

Black River Industries Celebrate 30 Years of Service

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development State Director, Frank Frassetto, joined State dignitaries and members of the Medford community at Black River Industries (BRI) on Friday, October 10th, in celebration of BRI's 30th anniversary.

BRI is an affirmative industry, which employs people with severe physical/cognitive disabilities as well as chronic mental illness and provides them with meaningful vocational and employment opportunities.

This 30 year milestone marks a legacy of caring for people with disabilities by providing employment, allowing them to live independently, including them as a part of the community.

BRI Board President, Jeff Armbrust, welcomed the audience by stating, "BRI enjoys great support of the community, and because of that support BRI's future is strong and bright."

Frassetto congratulated BRI on 30 years of service and commended BRI for their initiative and dedication in improving the quality of life within their community.

Brian Soland, director of Catholic Charities, traced the origins of BRI back to 1972 and the dedication of five community members who asked Catholic Charities to develop services for the developmentally disabled. He acknowledged founders Reiny Klingbeil, Darlene Nowak and Jane Bauer who were in attendance. He said, "All that is happening today is because five people had a vision and a dream. They believed that the developmentally disabled deserve the same things in life the rest of us have... above all respect and dignity."

Bishop Ralph Fliss said, "It is encouraging to see how many men and women of goodwill have reached out to help." He reminded everyone that the mission of BRI is to help people help themselves. He extended a special thanks to all those who make up the staff and BRI board, for their generous time and expertise.

"As we reflect on the work over 30 years at BRI, it is indeed good work," said Bishop Fliss. "It has created hope for those in search of answers in their lives. Our intent is to continue to provide that hope."

Other Dignitaries including Senator Russ Decker; Representative Mary Williams; Marjorie Bunce, representative of U.S. Senator Herb Kohl and Karen Graff, representative of U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, also spoke congratulating BRI on 30 years of service.



USDA Rural Development State Director, Frank Frassetto, congratulating BRI on their 30 years of successful service. Seated left to right: Medford Alderperson Archie Parent; Bob Gibbons, Weather Shield; Rev. Phillip J Heslin, Diocese of Superior; Taylor County Chairman Jim Metz; U.S. Senator Rep., Karen Graff; Rev. Warren Behling; Bishop Raphael Fliss (hidden), Diocese of Superior; Catholic Charities Executive Director Brian Soland; Dr. Dan Pilon, Chairman of Catholic Charities Board of Directors; Beth Carlson, Associate Director of Catholic Charities; Jim Hoegemeier, Executive Director of Arc-Wisconsin Disability Association; State Senator Russ Decker; Mike Kirby, Executive Director of Rehabilitation for Wisconsin.

History of BRI

What is now Black River Industries began as Taylor County Achievement Center on October 15, 1973 to provide services for developmentally disabled citizens of Taylor County.

Catholic Charities played a key role from the beginning, along with five individuals on the local Association for Retarded Citizens and the Taylor County Developmental Disabilities Board. These individuals pushing for the Achievement Center were Ellen Dietzler, Pearl Ruesch, Darlene Nowak, Jane Bauer and Reiny Klingbeil.

A survey of families in the county found four basic needs for disabled citizens: an achievement center, a group home, apartments and jobs.

The Achievement Center opened in the Happy Americans Club House on North Second Street in Medford. It was owned and operated by Catholic Charities.

For the first years, the Taylor County Human Services Department coordinated county, state and federal money to help cover expenses. They continue to be an important funding source and provide special programs for people with disabilities.

In 1977 the Achievement Center was moved to Hwy 13. Over the next few years, the Center gradually got into a work program with an array of services, training and sheltered employment for 43 clients.

In 1981, the Achievement Center underwent formal incorporation and became Black River Industries. Four years later apartments were built with a HUD



BRI founders Reiny Klingbeil, Darlene Nowak and Jane Bauer.

Specially designed to meet the needs of diverse program areas, it includes production areas, a warehouse, commercial kitchen, a community integration area, and office space. It was built with grants from Catholic Charities, a Rural Economic Development Grant for \$291,000 through TDS Telecom from USDA Rural Development, and donations from the Taylor County community.

Now BRI looks forward to many more years of service to the developmentally disabled community.



BLACK RIVER INDUSTRIES, INC.

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October 24, 2003

Mr. Frank Frassetto, State Director
USDA Rural Development Office
4949 Kirshling Ct.
Stevens Point, WI 54481

Dear Frank,

On behalf of Black River industries and the persons with disabilities whom we support, I want to thank you for attending and speaking at our 30th Anniversary Celebration. Further, we are very appreciative of the Rural Development Loan program, which was instrumental in our ability to purchase and modify our present building.

Your commitment to persons with disabilities, the elderly and Black River Industries is greatly appreciated. Thanks again.

Sincerely,



John Prindle
Director
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